



CATALYSTS OF IDEAS



Architect Sison Siy could have made it big even as a solo practitioner, but he is one strong believer in an emergent approach to design practice. In his book, architecture should emerge upon the talent, expertise, experience and inputs of people working together as a team.

In 1995, together with some friends he described as “the most creative and professional people I have ever worked with,” he formed a company that initially specialized in residential finishing service. They chose the corporate name I-Dea Catalysts.

“In setting up the company, I wanted to align the interests of my associates with the mission-vision of the company so they would have an incentive to stay,” he revealed. He made sure that they would have ample room for professional growth.

Architect Siy’s two-year work stint in Singapore made him realize that in the typical architectural firm setup, an

architect or designer had to work “anonymously” without expecting any credit or recognition for an outstanding job. “This is why a lot of young designers today are tempted to poach clients and strike off independently,” he lamented.

His cross-disciplinary approach has worked well in generating high levels of individual and team performance and more engagement. It has raised the company’s bar of expertise on residential work and paved the way for significant commercial projects.

I-Dea Catalysts’ diversifying allied services now include retail design and construction, office design, modular furniture fabrication, and architectural design and construction.

ASSOCIATES

Architect Siy’s three associates are Jodeth Hui, resident interior designer and office manager; George Uy, Jr., project engineer; and Xavier Savido, lead designer and draftsman. He met them through common friends in the design profession.

The corporate structure is so designed as to enable everyone to work with maximum efficiency and innovation. Mindful of the “fluid and extremely competitive” nature of the design profession, Architect Siy strives to keep the company “on the leading edge” by giving his architects and designers opportunities for professional development via seminars, construction industry exhibits and other trade events.

ACCESSIBLE DESIGNS

“I know it has become a cliché, but we at I-Dea go by the form- follows- function principle,” Architect Siy said. “We subscribe to simple and user-friendly designs and tight but workable timelines. We listen to our clients and aim to make them happy and satisfied with our work.”

Making designs accessible to clients is a must in I-Dea’s design process. The company uses the latest in design technology -- from conceptual sketches, renderings, and CAD drawings to models -- to give their clients the most vivid visuals or realistic images of the design ideas.

Efforts are taken to understand the client’s requirements and their rationale. Details are noted, questions are asked, and plans are mapped out accordingly. The company pays close attention to budgetary and time considerations while ensuring the consistency of the quality of the project.

The process of catalyzing ideas provides both the design team and the client a common ground for discussion, evaluation and development. This bolsters the confidence of the design team and enables the company to create unique interior environments that satisfy their intended economic, social, or cultural purpose.

A vital work principle that one can gather from Architect

Siy is his conviction that every project big or small should be tackled with an open mind. Solutions should be based not on preconceived ideas but on the requirements of the clients and the prevailing circumstances.

What would students and new architects learn from Architect Siy’s architectural projects?

He cited three things: One, that “nothing is impossible with an unlimited budget”; Two, always visualize how your design will be executed; and Three, think of “value engineering” in everything that you design. In other words, improve and maintain the value or function of a design with the use of cost-effective measures.

He said that because clients never fail to appreciate these three elements, architects could use them as a roadmap to success.

MARKETING

Another pointer from Architect Siy concerns marketing or how to build public awareness of one’s services.

“I remember this humorous quip from a professor in my review class: “In (the field of) architecture, either you have to be ‘relatively good’ or you have to have ‘good relatives;’” he beamed.

This is true, he said, especially for newcomers because “it is really difficult to bag that first project when one does not have a lot of connections, leads or a network of contact persons.”

For this reason, Architect Siy would like architecture and design schools to include a marketing subject in their curriculums. “Design skills or a highly creative mind alone would not attract commissions,” he said. “It is equally important to gain notice and generate interest among potential clients.”

A designer should also be able to keep up with the times, he added, “because architecture, being the most prevalent form of art, is inherently trendy.”

ASPIRATIONS

Since he was a child, Architect Siy has always been fascinated by engineering marvels, buildings and cities.

One of his present aspirations is to visit Falling Water, Frank Lloyd Wright’s most famous work. Hailed as “a timeless monument to organic architecture,” Falling Water is a mountain retreat commissioned by an affluent Jewish- American family. Built in Pennsylvania in 1936, the well-preserved residential complex continues to attract throngs of tourists until today.

Another feasible aspiration is to be able to design a sustainable tropical resort on an isolated island. “A beach bum most of my single years, I have this passion to do an ecologically friendly resort,” he said, foreseeing that all architectural structures in the future would be, to a certain extent, self sustaining and much kinder to their surroundings.

He, however, has one dream project which he thinks has a slim chance of seeing reality at this point in time. It’s an Apple- concept store with all those interactive displays, solutions zones, “water white” windows, bright interiors, huge poster walls, a sit-down theater, et al. Only those countries with high-traffic lifestyle centers and huge potentials for millions of dollars in store profits can make it to Apple’s priority list of locations.

REWARDS

Amid his possible and impossible dreams, however, this emerging architect can already savor the rewards of his thriving practice.

“There’s something inherently satisfying about seeing the completion of a project that you have visualized in your mind,” Architect Siy said. “It’s like having the power to create something beautiful and shape the way people interact with the space you’ve created. Success, after all, is being able to give people something that they can use, enjoy and be proud of.”

The ultimate reward that a designer can covet, he stressed, is to be able to add beauty to the environment, for the aesthetics of built environments can help make the world a better place to be. That, indeed, is a major catalyst for great and lasting design ideas and change. —By Prosy B. Montesines